

# At least eight dead after shooters fire on mass Mother's Day demonstration in Nicaragua

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On Wednesday, a Mother's Day march in Managua, where mothers of dead protesters and students headed a 5-kilometer-long stream of hundreds of thousands, ended when shooters opened fire on the crowd. Shocking images show hundreds crouching desperately in the open against flurries of bullets from semi-automatic or automatic weapons.

The shooters are still unknown, but videos show groups of police and masked men carrying rifles in the vicinity. When the shooting started, the marchers rushed to the nearby University campuses, the Managua Cathedral, the Metrocentro mall, and nearby homes for cover. New barricades were set up, and a cooperative's bank, a pro-government radio station, and cars were torched as anger flared and reports of further shootings continued throughout the evening.

The massacre of participants in what was likely the largest single demonstration since 1979 signals that the 45 days of demonstrations, which began with students and pensioners protesting IMF-dictated pension cuts on April 18, are trending toward more violent and wider social explosions.

Scattered media reports from hospitals indicate that at least 8 demonstrators died and more than 50 were injured on Wednesday in Managua, with demonstrators accusing the National Police and pro-government armed groups for firing. Opposition figures say at least 15 were killed.

The ruling Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) held a rally with thousands of supporters earlier Wednesday in Managua, at which president Daniel Ortega declared he intends to stay in power. The same day, the government reported that at least two Ortega supporters were shot dead and 20 were injured in the Estelí department when protesters manning a roadblock attacked them. Local NGOs reported that

three anti-government demonstrators died in Estelí, three more in Chinandega, and one in Masaya.

These incidents were preceded by the publication Tuesday of a report by Amnesty International, titled "Shoot to Kill: Nicaragua's Strategy to Repress Protest." Based on dozens of eyewitness reports, analysis by munitions experts, security camera, video and other footage, the report confirms that police and pro-government armed groups attacked protesters with firearms. Officials have repeatedly blocked medical attention, autopsies and investigations, have sought to intimidate and bribe families of the victims, and continue to criminalize the mostly student protesters.

The Amnesty report concludes: "Nicaraguan authorities have adopted a strategy of repression characterized by the excessive use of force, extrajudicial executions, control of the media, and the use of pro-government armed groups, to crush protests in which at least 81 people have been killed... 868 injured and 438 arrested."

After a preliminary report with similar findings was presented last week by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR), the government's "Commission for Truth" recognized 85 dead, including three police officers.

A new CID Gallup poll published Tuesday shows that 7 out of every 10 Nicaraguans surveyed support the demonstrations, with a majority not identifying with any political party. Thirty-one percent still back the FSLN, compared to 52 percent last September. However, significant numbers of FSLN supporters oppose the Ortega clique.

The organizers of the Mother's Day march, the "Civil Alliance for Justice and Democracy," have been struggling to contain and channel the social anger behind a backroom "national dialogue" with the Daniel

Ortega administration, using the Catholic Church as a mediator. After Wednesday's incidents, however, the Church leaders suspended the talks.

Composed of the local American Chamber of Commerce, the business organization COSEP, the university-student leadership, the Anti-Canal Peasant Movement, among other organizations backed by the right-wing opposition parties, the "Civil Alliance" has exploited the protests to force the government to resume talks aimed at immediately stripping the FSLN of its control over the security and justice apparatus by naming new judges and top officials, eventually reducing the size of the FSLN-controlled Congress and calling for snap elections.

Last week, the US State Department called for supporting the "national dialogue." Its diplomatic arm in Latin America, the Organization of the American States has insisted on an "electoral solution," with its Secretary General, Luis Almagro, insisting Tuesday that Nicaragua is still a democracy.

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Last Thursday, *McClatchy DC* spoke to several senior Trump administration officials in anonymity about the Nicaraguan crisis, commenting that they are meeting frequently as it is "an important matter to us." One official said that the Trump government is ready to "act" if Ortega "fails to stem the violence or uses the dialogue as a stalling tactic." However, he added, "We have to let part of that process play out because we demanded this process."

In other words, while still hoping that Ortega can repress the protests into submission and continue imposing US austerity demands, Washington is ready to support a change in government through the agenda of the "national dialogue" to stem the social unrest amid an ever-wider resurgence of the class struggle across the region and the world.

So far, the US has avoided imposing financial sanctions like those against Venezuelan officials, in order not to feed Ortega's "anti-US" demagoguery. In part, Washington's approach is explained by recent statements from the Pentagon, urging Nicaragua to break its ties with Russia and China, which have strengthened during Ortega's rule.

Within the ruling class, there are conflicting tactics over how to proceed. On the far-right, the deeply

unpopular Broad Front for Democracy (FAD) and other opposition parties hope to gain from the repression and have been making provocative calls for "bolder" protests and an immediate change in power. On the other hand, the business organizations have continued appealing to Ortega to find a way to stop the protests, calling for a more gradual "democratic reform." The COSEP has so far opposed any call for a "national strike," fearing that a massive employer lockout will actually trigger a wider active participation of the working class in the crisis that could escape the control of the "Civil Alliance."

No faction of the "national dialogue", of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, the state armed forces, and state appendages like the trade unions—which are all guided by the capitalist imperative of attracting foreign investments—represents any opposition to imperialist control, to austerity, or social inequality. The ruling elite is grappling over which is the best way to subordinate growing social opposition behind bourgeois politics and resume its attacks against the social and democratic rights of the working class.



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